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The Glen Project: A Transformational Ecology Model of School-based Universal Mental Health Development

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Recent findings from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) found that youth organizations around the world have expressed concern about the impact of COVID-19 on the mental well-being of socio-economically disadvantaged youth and their families (OECD, 2020). Disruptions to educational access, inequalities in home learning environments, and economic distress have increased stress, anxiety, depression, and loneliness in our young people. Additionally, increased reports of domestic violence and cases of racism and discrimination (UNESCO, 2020) have left long-lasting psychological effects in youth's mental health.

In 2021 the U.S. Department of Education released a new resource promoting school-based mental health, social and emotional well-being among children (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Now more than ever, it is important for schools to provide students and families with universal mental health services that increase the social-emotional competencies needed to restore psychological security and well-being (Charania, 2022). Knowing that children thrive in a multi-systems approach to mental health development, a growing number of schools have utilize generic approach to deliver school-based mental health services (Taylor et al, 2017); however, there is scant empirical evidence investigating universal mental health services for low income, Latinx children and their families attending public schools (Fusar-Poli, 2019; Gándara, 2017; Garbacz et al., 2021). Scholars are calling for the study of multicomponent, coordinated interventions that are theory-driven and promote the positive development of Latinx children in real-world community settings (Cabrera, 2013; Erbstein & Fabionar, 2019).

Previous studies conclude that positive youth development interventions for racially diverse children are most effective in schools when they (a) build positive factors rather than reduce negative factors, (b) increase students' developmental assets and (c) positively impact the school environment (Greenberg, et al., 2003; Smith, Witherspoon & Osgood, 2017; Waters, 2011). Building upon past findings, this quasi-experimental case study utilizes a sample of 27 teachers, the school administrator, and 281 low-income,

Latinx children and their parents living in northern California to test the hypothesis that a school-based universally designed mental health program can strengthen students' developmental asset attainment and foster a positive school environment.

Theoretical Foundation

Since the early 1990's developmental scientists have approached the study of youth development from a strength-based perspective anticipating that positive changes can occur when youth assets are aligned with resources for healthy growth within the family, school, and the community (Bornstein et al., 2003; Shek et al., 2019) When a systematic promotion of youth asset development occurs over time researchers note that youth thrive (Dowling et al., 2004; Lerner et al., 2005).

The Developmental Assets Framework

The asset building theoretical framework informing this study (Benson, et al., 1998) stems from an understanding in developmental psychology that characterizes the child as a developing person, embedded in multiple contexts (or ecologies), and who participates in dynamic ecological transactions. Benson et al. (2006) studied the key supports that are needed for youth to thrive across diverse social and ecological settings. These resources are described as the *nutrients* needed to sustain the growth of a healthy young person (Benson, 2003). Viewing youth development programs as a source of asset attainment originates from the bioecological construct that macro-level systems can positively affect healthy change in youth living (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Summarizing his work at the Search Institute in Minneapolis, Benson (2007) describes his model of positive youth development as an accumulation of 40 assets that predict resiliency and the ability to thrive. External assets are comprised of positive support that youth receive from peers, parents, teachers, neighbors, and other important adults in their life. Internal assets are characteristics that reflect personal psychological strengths. The combined internal and external assets encompass eight thriving indicators.

Benson posits that the quantity and strength of developmental assets can positively or negatively impact youth behaviors. An increase in the number of assets in a young person's life can significantly reduce risky teen behaviors such as alcohol, tobacco, and drug abuse, antisocial behavior, violence, school failure, sexual activity, attempted suicide, and gambling. Although several past studies have reported that the cumulative effect of assets is associated with an increase in academic achievement, resiliency, leadership, pro social behavior, the delay of gratification, and the affirmation of diversity; few studies have investigated the effects of individual asset development in the lives of Latinx children in an elementary school setting (Ramirez et al., 2017).

The Transformational Ecology Model of Developmental Asset Attainment

Children live in multiple microsystems of interrelated relationships that exist both inside and outside of school (McElvain, 2009; Sameroff, 2002). These mesosystem interactions between the child, school, family, peers, and community relationships are not static (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). They are dynamic, synergistic communiqué that affect change within the "system" therefore we consider them "transformational". In describing the socialization patterns that occur within each system Berns (2016) states, "The social context of individual interactions and experiences determines the degree to which individuals can develop their abilities and realize their potential" (p. 20).

Mirroring John Dewey's (1949) thinking, Figure 1 depicts the ecologically centered, theoretical model utilized in this study. The Transformational Ecology Model of Developmental Asset Attainment views the child's ecosystem as an amalgamation of four socializing microsystems: (a) school, (b) family, (c) peers, and (d) community. Embedded within and between each microsystem are developmental assets that drive dynamic co-actions designed to socially influence the child. Each developmental asset is seen as a protective factor that acts to strengthen the child's capacity for positive development. Internal assets originate from the child and have the potential to evoke positive change in school, family, peer, and community contexts. External assets stem from each microsystem

and can potentially develop a child who academically achieves and is socially caring. Therefore, when we take this eco-developmental approach, we view the positive development of children more broadly because communities are portrayed as relational spaces where intentional efforts are made to integrate children as resources and contributors to their families, schools, and neighborhoods (Goldstein & Brooks, 2014).

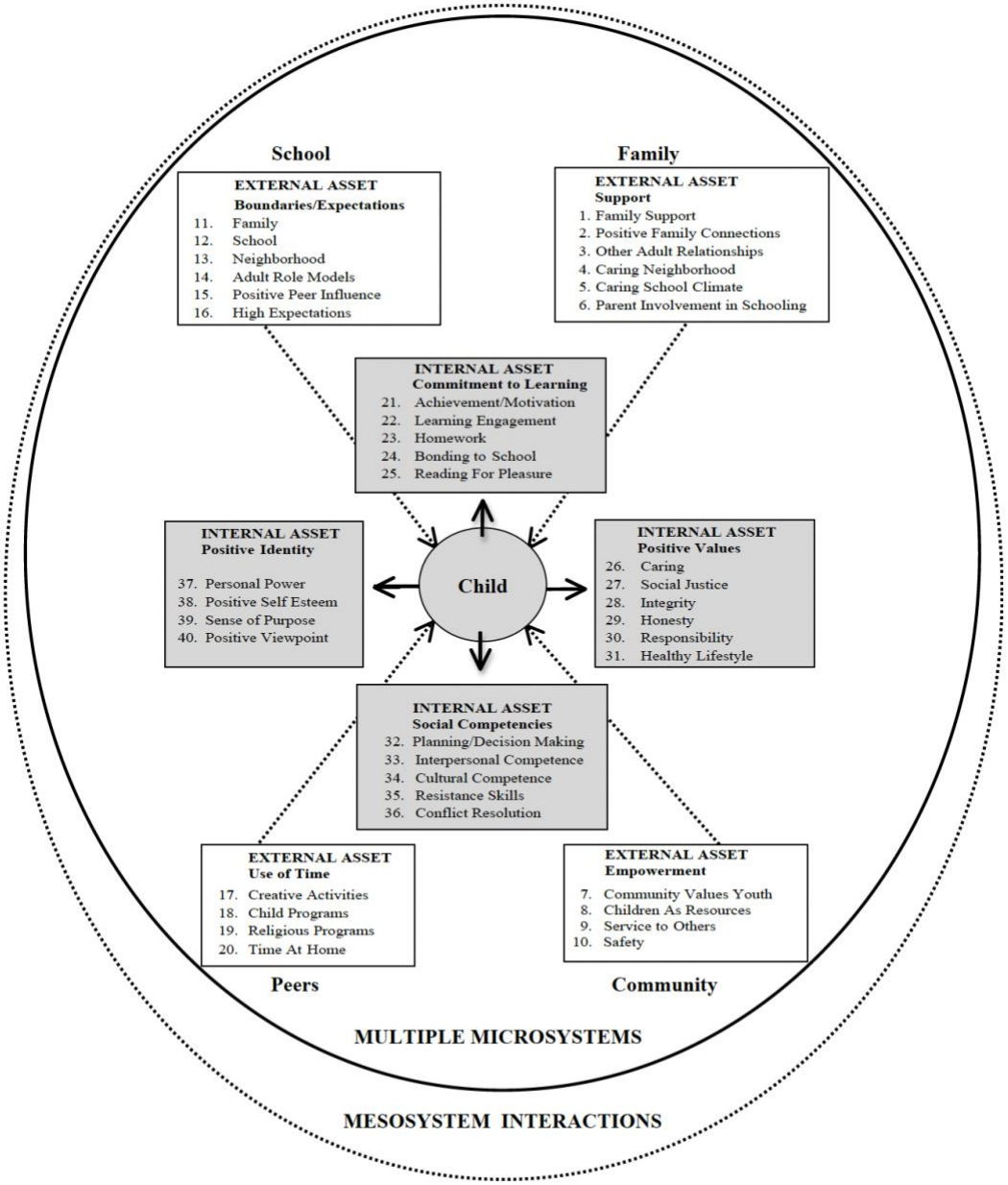

Figure 1. The transformational ecology model of developmental asset attainment incorporating theoretical elements from Bronfenbrenner (1979), Sameroff (1975), McElvain (2009).

Study Aims and Guiding Questions

The purpose of this 10-month case study was to investigate the effects of a multi-tiered, universal mental health program (The Glen Project) on the (a) individual developmental asset attainment of low-income, K-5th grade Latinx students, (b) families, and (c) components of the school climate. The guiding questions for the study were:

1. What were the overall asset attainment differences for participating students over 10-months?
2. What was the asset attainment among subjects participating in separate settings?
3. How did students describe their asset development? How did parents describe their child's asset development?
4. How did the Glen Project impact the school climate?

The Glen Project was a five-year positive child development initiative funded by a Prevention Early Intervention (PEI) grant whose goal was to reduce disparities in access to mental health interventions among underserved cultural populations due to stigma, discrimination, and lack of knowledge about mental health services. The Glen Project utilized a multi-level school-based strategy to address family needs in multiple settings such as the school, the community, in the families' homes, and at community-based organizations. This study investigated the first year of the program's implementation.

Because Developmental Asset attainment is seen as a measure of childhood resiliency and the ability to thrive, this study explored how the Glen Project improved student Developmental Asset attainment within the first year of program implementation. The study investigated program affects within eight asset indicators: Support, Empowerment, Boundaries and Expectations, Constructive Use of Time, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, and Social Competencies. To investigate the effects of the program more deeply, the researcher examined the effects of two program levels: (a) mental health services and (b) school support services. Corroborative qualitative data determined (a)

how students perceived their asset development, and (b) how parents perceived their child's asset development.

The Glen Project services for students and families were organized using a universal "School-Centric" approach. This approach views teachers and administrators as key partners in all aspects of the program. For this reason, this study gathered survey and interview data from the teachers and the principal in order to understand how the Glen Project impacted the overall school climate.

The original vision for the Glen Project was grounded in an ecological systems approach to positive child development. Initial communication with the parents and the community included all aspects of the child's ecology. For example, when the Glen Project was in its design phase, the school distributed a bilingual survey to every family asking parents to prioritize the needs of their child. The information from the survey helped to determine the types of services the school offered and prompted the formation of an advisory board composed of parents, teachers, the administrator, community social agencies, and local university faculty. Subsequently, the advisory board developed the school based universal mental health program (The Glen Project) that continues to meet monthly to assess program effectiveness and strategize future program services.

This study investigated two levels of Glen Project program services. Table 1 describes each service. The Glen Project Prevention Early Intervention (PEI) services were funded by a PEI grant and included one full time school psychologist and several part time therapists from two community-counseling centers. Bilingual therapists were used to more effectively interact with families who spoke no English.

The Glen Project school support services were funded by the district and the school. Table 2 describes each service. All child development services were free, site-based, and meant to target a wide variety of families. All school support services were offered outside of school hours throughout the school year.

Table 1

PEI Service Description, Implementation Timeline, and Participation Rate

	Service	Service Description	Timeline	S(*n*)	P(*n*)	%
1	Strengthening Families	A 14-session, parenting skills, children's life skills, and family life skills training program specifically designed for high-risk families. Parents and children participate, both separately and together in fourteen 2-hours group sessions preceded by a meal that includes informal family practice time. Strengthening Families was delivered by Parent Instructors and PEI case managers/coordinators.	Jan - June	11	16	20
2	Triple P Level 4	Positive Parenting Program (Triple P) is a multi-level parenting program designed to provide appropriate treatment based on families' needs and presenting circumstances. Triple P4 targets parents requiring intensive training in positive parenting in either a group or individual setting. Triple P4 was facilitated by Parent Instructors and PEI Case Managers/Coordinators.	Jan - June	2	2	3
3	Triple P Level 5	Triple P 5 targets parents of children with behavior problems and family adjustment difficulties or parents with anger management issues, in both group and individual settings. Triple P5 was facilitated by PEI Therapists.	Jan - June	2	1	2
4	Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT)	An evidence-based treatment intervention designed to help youth and their parents overcome the negative effect of traumatic life events such as abuse, loss of a loved one, violence, etc. TF-CBT was utilized by PEI Therapists.	Jan - June	5	6	8
5	Case Management Services	Case managers facilitate Strengthening Families, Triple P 4, manage cases, crisis intervention, link & refer families, and respond to daily school needs. Case managers are coordinated through the PEI management team.	Jan - June	20	22	33
6	Outreach	Recruitment of students for all PEI modalities and services.	Jan - June	45	--	19

Note. S=students, P=parent, %=percent of total PEI participants. The school was awarded a 5-yr Prevention Early Intervention (PEI) grant to develop and coordinate all mental health services for students and their families. This was the first year of the grant - 47% of the sample parents and students participating in the Glen Project positive youth development program received PEI services.

Table 2

School Support Service Description, Implementation Timeline, and Participation Rate

	School Support Service	Service Description	Implementation	S(*n*)	P(*n*)	%
1	"Why Try"	The "Why Try" program helps students learn how to deal with life's daily pressures and challenges by giving them tools to help them in their decision making process.	May	16	--	11
2	Community Gang Forum	Members of the community meet with parents and students to talk about addressing the gang problem in the city and school's surrounding neighborhood.	October	10	12	20
3	Community and Family Health Resource Fair	A variety of health agencies from the city and county set up a resource fair to share their services with parents and students. Parents and students peruse dozens of information booths and participate in several information sessions. The purpose is to build awareness, link service providers with clients, and build community within the school.	March	13	20	22
4	Power School	PowerSchool is an after school collaboration between the district and community based organization partners. Every day Power School offers a healthy snack, support with homework, an academic component to support school day learning, recreation time to encourage a healthy physically active lifestyle, and an enrichment program. Power school utilizes CASA de Milagros, and a Visual and Performing Arts curriculum created by the Youth Alliance.	August-June	42	--	28
5	Skillstreaming	*Skillstreaming* is a four-part training program that uses demonstration, role-playing, enactment feedback, and simple social principles—to develop social competence in children.	August-June	36	--	24

NOTE. S=student, P=parent. %=percent of total school support services participants. 53% of the sample parents and students participating in the Glen Project positive youth development program received school support services.

Background and Setting

This study was conducted in a community serving a highly vulnerable population. According to the county's Mental Health Department (MHD) Risk Rating Study, the students served by the school were identified as at risk for school failure due to unaddressed emotional and behavioral problems. The school had the highest risk ratings (5.3 out of 6) relative to its population (52,000) associated with indicators of poverty, substance abuse, child removals, juvenile justice entries, mental health clients, and teen mothers. Relative to other communities comprising the county, the school was impacted due

to its partial remoteness and semi-rural demographic placing it far from essential services. Community violence and gang activity were also on the rise. Incidences of violent crimes, murder, robbery, and theft exceeded the national average, while economic shortfalls drastically strapped the necessary resources from law enforcement and fire departments.

The school administrator reported that most (95%) of the students at the K-5th grade elementary school in this study lived below the poverty line and were first, or second-generation Latinx immigrants from Mexico. She also characterized the neighborhood surrounding the school as "crime ridden" and the majority of the children "came to school traumatized and unable to focus on academics." The principal of the school and the school psychologist reported severe school wide behavior problems affecting the children's school performance at a very young age. Data obtained from the administration reported a rising number of yearly office referrals (a) discipline referrals (*n*=127), (b) academic referrals (*n*=171), and (c) suspensions (*n*=41).

Informal conversations with the principal also revealed a psychosocial disconnect between the school staff, parents, and students. Most of the teachers (*n*=27) were white (*n*=23), female (*n*=24), non-Hispanic residents of the city who grew up in the neighborhood before the current demographic shift. They expressed a belief that the school was an unsafe place because of students' destructive behaviors, home/school cultural linguistic mismatch, and psychosocial misunderstanding of the effects of poverty on learning. Moreover, several parents confidentially relayed their own negative attitudes to the administrators. They frequently reported distrust toward school personnel because of perceived injustices experienced by their children.

Methods

Research to practice scholarship has found that a greater potential for consensus occurs when multiple sources of evidence support a particular conclusion (Lloyd-Jones, 2003). This case study

utilized a mixed methods approach to ascertain the effects of the Glen Project universal mental health program on students' asset attainment and overall school climate.

Multiple sources of data were collected from (a) *Developmental Assets Preteen Profile* (DAP-P) surveys, (b) student interviews, (c) bilingual parent interviews, (d) *Creating A Great Place to Learn Survey* (CGPL) (d) pre/post administrative referral reports, and (e) an end of the year exit interview with the principal.

Participants

Two levels of human subjects' approval were obtained from (a) the county Health Services Institutional Review Board, and (b) university Institutional Review Board. Informed consent was obtained from all human subjects involved in the study. The Glen Project subjects were divided into four groups (a) students, (b) parents, (c) teachers, and (d) the principal. Student asset attainment was studied in two settings (a) PEI mental health services and (b) school support services. Program enrollment data was ascertained through event sign in sheets and services participant data.

The self-selected parent and student sample (*n*=281) included over twice as many students (*n*=202) as there were parents (*n*=79). The student and parent distribution were fairly equal across grade levels and gender (see Table 3). Most of the students (96%) and parents were Hispanic, and most families (91%) qualified for free lunch.

Within the student sample approximately 42% received PEI mental health services, 58% participated in informal school support services. Among parents, approximately 59% received PEI mental health services, and 41% participated in informal school support services.

Table 3

Total Student and Parent Demographics and Numbers Receiving Services

	n	K	1	2	3	4	5	Male	Female	White	Asian	Hispanic	Black	Free Lunch	PEI	School Support
Students	202	36	38	32	31	34	31	108	94	4	3	193	2	181	85	117
Parents	79	--	--	--	--	--	--	38	41	0	2	76	1	69	47	32
Total	281	--	--	--	--	--	--	146	135	4	5	269	3	250	132	149
%	100	18	19	16	15	17	15	51	49	0.01	0.01	96	0.01	91	47	53

Note. Student grade level data was not collected for parents, PEI=Prevention Early Intervention. Financial eligibility guidelines for free meals in California Child Nutrition Programs for a family of four are $34,060 per year (California Department of Education, 2021).

Within the total sample, a self-selected group of students (*n*=54) and parents (*n*=34) receiving services agreed to participate in individual interviews. The interviewed student sample was equally distributed across gender but not grade level (see Table 4). More students in grade 1 (24%) and grade 4 (24%) agreed to participate in the interview. Most of the interviewed students receiving Glen Project services were Hispanic (95%) and qualified for free and reduced lunch (90%).

Table 4

Demographics, Socioeconomic Status and Grade Level of Interviewed Students

	n	Male	Female	White	Asian	Hispanic	Black	Free Lunch	K	1	2	3	4	5
Interviewed Students	54	26	28	1	1	51	1	49	2	13	7	9	13	10
%	100	48	51	.02	.02	95	.02	90	.03	24	13	17	24	19

Note. Services include Prevention Early Intervention (PEI) and School Support. Financial eligibility guidelines for free meals in California Child Nutrition Programs for a family of four are $34,060 per year (California Department of Education, 2021).

Also, most of the interviewed parents participating in the Glen Project were Hispanic (90%) and qualified for free and reduced lunch (90%). More females (88%) than males (12%) participated in the interview. Table 5 reports that a significant number of parents shared that they never attended school (40%), were non-English speakers, (78%) and self-identified as undocumented immigrants (61%).

Table 5

Demographics, Socioeconomic, Education, Citizenship and Language Level of Interviewed Parents

	n	Male	Female	White	Asian	Hispanic	Free Lunch	C	HS	M	E	N/A	DOC	UNDOC	ENG	NON-ENG
Interviewed Parents	34	4	30	1	3	31	31	2	5	5	8	14	13	21	7	27
%	100	12	88	3	7	90	90	7	15	13	23	40	39	61	22	78

Note. Services include Prevention Early Intervention (PEI) and School Support. Financial eligibility guidelines for free meals in California Child Nutrition Programs for a family of four are $34,060 per year (California Department of Education, 2021). C=College, HS=High School, M=Middle School, E=Elementary, N/A=No Education, DOC = Documented, UNDOC = Undocumented, ENG = English Speaker, NON-ENG = Non-English Speaker.

Most of the teachers in the school (*n*=23) agreed to participate in the study. Most were female (*n*=20), and White (*n*=15). The teaching experience in the school varied. Some teachers had worked in the school 1-2 years (*n*=7), others worked 6-10 years (*n*=5), but most worked more than 10 years (*n*=9). Only one teacher worked in the school for less than a year.

To support the goals of the Glen Project, all teachers received the following training programs throughout the year: a) the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, (b) the Love and Logic Discipline Program and (c) The Therapeutic Crisis Intervention Protocol Training. The training programs were

funded by the PEI grant and local school funding. The training programs were rolled out in sequential phases. This research project investigated the school climate program effects in year one of the professional development sequence.

The principal in the school was a female, native Spanish speaker who had been at the school for three years. The principal was pivotal in the development of the program and was instrumental in obtaining the PEI, district, and school funding to support the project for five years. The researcher conducted an informal exit interview with the principal to ascertain her perspectives of program effectiveness on various aspects of the school climate.

Procedures

At the beginning of the school year the researcher met with the staff and faculty to outline the parameters of the research project. The principal sent home a bilingual letter explaining the purpose of the study to each family along with the bilingual consent form. As part of the *Promotores* Program supported by the PEI grant, a Spanish speaking parent liaison made individual contact with parents to explain the program services and invite them to participate in a bilingual telephone interview. Student assent forms were distributed once parent consent was received. Teachers randomly invited students with consent forms to participate in individual interviews conducted in class.

The timeline for the data collection occurred at the beginning and at the end of the academic year. In September and May, the teachers administered the Developmental Assets Preteen Profile (DAP-P) to students and the researcher obtained the end of the year administrative referral report from the previous academic year. The bilingual Spanish/English DAP-P was mailed home for parents to complete. In May, research assistants conducted student interviews and bilingual parent telephone interviews. The researcher then collected the end of the year administrative referral report and conducted an informal end of the year exit interview with the principal.

Instrumentation and Data Analysis

A variety of quantitative and qualitative instruments were used to ascertain the effects of the Glen Project on students' asset development and the school climate. The researcher gathered data from students, parents, teachers, and the principal to understand the full scope of the project's impact. The analysis procedure is presented within each instrumentation description.

Instruments

The Search Institute's Student Developmental Assets Preteen Profile (DAP-P) is a social-emotional assessment which measures youth internal strengths and external supports over time. The DAP-P survey (Search Institute, 2011) was developed for the researcher in a beta version and was administered in the fall and spring. It utilizes a 4-point Likert-scale with 58 questions that prompt students to choose between *Never*, *Sometimes*, *A lot,* and *Always* responses. The DAP-P surveys for the student sample were analyzed using descriptive statistics, a Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test, and a One-Way Repeated Measures *ANOVA.*

A K-5 interview protocol was developed by the researcher to complement the DAP-P survey and qualitatively ascertain students' perceptions of their developmental asset attainment. Research assistants trained in effective interviewing strategies for children conducted individual interviews in the students' classroom in English. When short answers were given by the students, the interviewer asked clarifying follow up questions to better understand the child's perspective. The 20-question interview asked open-ended questions that were related to each of the asset categories (see Figure 2).

The Glen Project Student Interview Questions

ASSET CATEGORY	QUESTION
	What Glen Project program did you participate in this year?
Support	1. Does your teacher think the program was good for you? How do you know?
	2. Do your parents like it when you go to the program? How do you know?
	3. Did the program help you make new grownup friends? Who were they?
Empowerment	4. Did the program help you feel more important in school? Home? Neighborhood?
	5. Did the program help you feel safer at home? School? Neighborhood?
Boundaries & Expectations	6. Did the program help you do things that are good at school? Home? Neighborhood? What good things do you do?
	7. Who has helped you the most in the program? How did they help you?
	8. Did the program help you make better friends? How?
Constructive Use of Time	9. Did the program teach you to spend your time more wisely? How?
	10. Do you try new things after-school because you went to the program? What?
Commitment to Learning	11. Did the program help you want to do better in school? How?
	12. Did the program help you want to learn new things? How?
Positive Values	13. Do you help others more because you went to the program? How?
	14. Did the program teach you to say how you feel to others more often? How?
Social Competencies	15. Did the program help you make new friends? How?
	16. Did the program help you like people who are different from you? How?
	17. Are you better at talking with others because you went to the program? How?
	18. Did the program teach you what to do when you feel upset? How?
Positive Identity	19. Do you like yourself better because you went to the program? How?
	20. Do your friends like you better because you went to the program? Why?

Figure 2. The Glen Project student interview questions.

A bilingual parent telephone interview protocol was also developed by the researcher to compliment the DAP-P survey and ascertain parents' perceptions of their child's asset attainment. Bilingual Spanish/English research assistants trained in effective interviewing strategies for adults made appointments with each parent to conduct the telephone interview. Like the student interview protocol, the 24-question parent interview asked open-ended questions related to each asset category (see Figure 3).

The Glen Project Parent Interview Questions

ASSET CATEGORY	QUESTION
	How has being involved in the Glen Project affected…
Support	1. How your child feels about his/her teacher?
	2. How you support your child at home? In school?
	3. Your communication with your child? Your child's teacher?
	4. Adults your child can go to for advice and support? Who are they?
	5. Your school involvement?
Empowerment	6. How important your child feels in school? Home? Neighborhood?
	7. How safe your child feels at home? School? Neighborhood?
Boundaries & Expectations	8. Your family rules and consequences?
	9. How you model positive, responsible behavior for your child?
	10. How your child interacts with you? Family? Friends? Teacher?
Constructive Use of Time	11. How your child spends his/her time?
	12. The number of hours your child spends each week in after school activities? Sports? Lessons? Church? Other organizations?
Commitment to Learning	13. Your child's motivation to do well in school? Learn new things?
	14. The number of hours your child does homework?
Positive Values	15. How your child helps at home? In the neighborhood? At school?
	16. Your child's motivation to stand up for his/her beliefs?
	17. Your child's ability to tell the truth?
	18. Your child's level of responsibility?
Social Competencies	19. Your child's ability to make and keep new friends?
	20. Your child's ability to plan ahead and make good decisions?
	21. How your child resolves conflict?
	22. How your child handles anger or frustration?
	23. Your child's level of self-control?
Positive Identity	24. How your child feels about himself or herself?
	25. How your child feels about his or her future?

Figure 3. The Glen Project parent interview questions.

An informal end of the year principal interview was conducted by the researcher to understand how the Glen Project affected the school climate in terms of student discipline, teacher/student relationships and parent involvement. The principal was asked to share her insights verbally and in a written reflection. The principal also submitted an end of the year Discipline Report which compared annual referrals from the previous year. The Discipline Report was analyzed using descriptive statistics and supported with quotes from the written reflection.

The *Creating a Great Place to Learn* (CGPL) survey developed by the Search Institute (Search Institute, 2006) was utilized in this study to understand school climate perceptions among participating

teachers (*n*=23). The CGPL has been nationally tested and demonstrates good reliability and validity (Voight & Hanson, 2012). The 84-question survey is organized on a 5-point Likert-scale: (1) *strongly disagree*, (2), *disagree*, (3) *neither agree nor disagree*, (4) *agree*, and (5) *strongly agree*. The pre survey was administered in October and the post survey was administered in June. Three categories form the basis of the survey: (a) Relationships - intrapersonal dynamics within the school, (b) Organizational Attributes - organizational culture, quality of the work environment, and (c) Personal Development - adaptive efficacy and commitment. Descriptive statistics were used to compare percentage changes in the pre and post survey results. Significant differences in the pre and post survey data indicating a response rate of more than 50% were analyzed in each category by survey question.

Content Analysis Procedures

Content analysis was used to analyze emerging themes from student, parent interview transcripts to further understand the perceived effects of the program. Using a priori coding (Weber, 1990) five native Spanish speakers assisted the researcher through each step of the content analysis procedure. The research team (a) read through the corpus of parent and student interviews, (b) sorted the interview transcripts by question, (c) coded them by trait and theme within each developmental asset category. The team then totaled the number of responses within each theme and represented the total as a percentage of the total number of subject responses. When substantive differences in interpretation arose, the analysts worked them together into a dialogue leading to an intersubjective agreement of .98 (Krippendorff, 1980).

Results

Recognizing the need to document Developmental Asset growth within the psychosocial development of the child, this study utilized a mixed methods approach to ascertain the effects of the Glen Project in multiple domains. Triangulated data were collected from the DAP-P student surveys,

the *Creating a Great Place to Learn* teacher surveys, child, parent, and administrator interviews. A Bonferroni correction was used to reduce the chances of obtaining false-positive results (type I errors) because multiple pair wise tests were performed on a single set of data. Overall, there were item-level significant differences in asset attainment. Data results are presented as they relate to the four questions posed for this study.

Research Question #1

What were the asset attainment differences for participating students over 10 months? A Wilcoxon signed-rank z-test for all students (n=415) revealed that DAP-P scores from the fall to spring reported a statistically significant change in seven out of eight asset categories within a 10-month period (see Table 6). A Mann-Whitney test indicated that student asset scores increased from fall (M=1.65) to spring (M=1.80) in the *Social Competencies* category for the trait "Positive Interactions", Z=-2.22, p<.05; in the *Commitment to Learning* category for the trait "Cares About School" from fall (M=2.50) to spring (M=2.69), Z=-4.06, p<.001; in the *Positive Values* category for the trait "Avoids Alcohol" from fall (M=2.33) to spring (M=2.49), Z=-2.28, p<.022; in the *Constructive Use of Time* category for the trait "Religious Activity" from fall (M=1.86) to spring (M=1.98), Z=-2.17, p<.029; in the *Boundaries and Expectations* category for the trait "Clear School Rules" from fall (M=2.72) to spring (M=2.78), Z=-2.16, p<.030; in the *Support* category for the trait "Parents Help" from fall (M=2.72) to spring (2.78), Z=-1.90, p<.047; and for the trait "Family Support" from fall (M=2.81) to spring (M=2.89), Z=-2.28, p<.023. Of interest there was a significant decrease in student asset scores for the trait "Seeks Parent Advice" in the *Support* category from fall (M=2.22) to spring (M=1.00), Z=-3.31, p<.001 and for the trait "Participates in Sports, Clubs, Groups" in the *Constructive Use of Time* category from fall (M=2.02) to spring (M=1.80), Z=-2.82, p<.005.

Table 6

Wilcoxon Signed Rank z-test and Descriptive Statistics of Asset Attainment for Total Sample

Question	Asset Category	Trait	Rate	*Z*	*p*	Fall *M (SD)*	Spring *M (SD)*
4	IA - Social Competencies	Positive Interactions	Increase	-2.22	.026*	1.65 (1.3)	1.80 (1.3)
7	IA - Commitment to Learning	Cares About School	Increase	-4.06	.001***	2.50 (.83)	2.69 (.63)
9	IA - Positive Values	Avoids Alcohol	Increase	-2.28	.022*	2.33 (1.1)	2.49 (1.0)
13	EA - Support	Seeks Parent Advice	Decrease	-3.31	.001***	2.22 (.98)	1.00 (1.1)
31	EA – Constructive use of Time	Religious Activity	Increase	-2.17	.029*	1.86 (1.4)	1.98 (1.0)
34	EA - Constructive Use of Time	Sports, Clubs, Groups	Decrease	-2.82	.005**	2.02 (1.2)	1.80 (1.2)
44	EA - Boundaries & Expectations	Clear School Rules	Increase	-2.16	.030*	2.72 (.64)	2.78 (.54)
47	EA - Support	Parents Help	Increase	-1.90	.047*	2.72 (.58)	2.78 (.53)
54	EA – Support	Family Support	Increase	-2.28	.023*	2.81 (.56)	2.89 (.41)

Note. * p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001. Data obtained from the Developmental Assets Preteen Profile (DAP-P) survey.

Research Question #2

What was the asset attainment among subjects participating in separate settings? To understand the asset attainment in two separate settings, a One-Way Repeated Measures *ANOVA* was performed on DAP-P scores for participants receiving PEI mental health and school support services. Outcomes reported that in three out of four internal asset categories, participants receiving both PEI mental health services and school support services made significant gains (see Table 7). The single significant gain for PEI participants occurred in the *Positive Values* asset category for the trait “Is Encouraged to Help”, Wilks’ Lambda=.990, F(1,413)=3.58, p=.05. For subjects participating in school support services there was a significant gain in the *Positive Identity* asset category for the trait “Overcomes Challenges”, Wilks’ Lambda=.987, F(1,413)=4.77, p=.029, and a significant gain in the *Commitment to Learning* asset category for the trait “Tries New Things”, Wilks’ Lambda=.983, F(1,409)=6.31, p=.012. Notably there was a significant decrease in the *Constructive Use of Time* asset category for the trait “Sports, Clubs, Groups”, Wilks’ Lambda=.975, F(1,357)=9.116, p=003.

Table 7

One-Way Repeated Measures ANOVA Reporting Student Asset Attainment Among Subjects Receiving PEI and School Support Services

Service	Asset Category	Trait	Rate	Source	Type III SS	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*	Partial η^2
PEI	IA – Positive Values	Encouraged To Help	Increase	Between subjects						
				Intercept	2123.779	1	2123.779	2179.464	.001	.858
				Error	350.802	413	.974			
				Within Subjects						
				Q33*PEI	1.924	1	1.924	3.580	.05	.010
				Error	193.508	413	.548			
SCHOOL	IA – Positive Identity	Overcomes Challenges	Increase	Between subjects						
				Intercept	2562.290	1	2562.290	2098.831	.001	.854
				Error	439.393	413	1.221			
				Within Subjects						
				Q15*School	3.686	1	3.686	4.778	.029	.013
				Error	277.761	413	.772			
SCHOOL	IA – Commitment To Learning	Tries New Things	Increase	Between subjects						
				Intercept	3775.654	1	3775.654	5631.687	.001	.940
				Error	239.344	409	.670			
				Within Subjects						
				Q28*School	3.176	1	3.176	6.313	.012	.017
				Error	179.588	409	.503			
SCHOOL	EA – Constructive Use of Time	Sports, Clubs, Groups	Decrease	Between subjects						
				Intercept	1306.860	1	1306.860	1377.716	.001	.794
				Error	338.640	357	.949			
				Within Subjects						
				Q34*School	17.877	1	17.877	9.116	.003	.025
				Error	700.123	357	1.961			

Note. * p<.05, *PEI=Prevention Early Intervention, *School = School Support Services. Data obtained from the Developmental Assets Preteen Profile (DAP-P) survey.

Research Question #3

How did students describe their asset development? How did parents describe the child's asset development? To understand the asset perceptions more deeply among students and parents, the researcher incorporated self-selected qualitative interviews into the project design. The individual conversations with students took approximately 30 minutes and the bilingual parent interviews took 45 minutes to 1 hour. The student interviews informed the study about asset development from the child's perspective. The parent interviews helped the researcher understand how the parents felt about their child's asset attainment. The researcher worked with the school to maintain records of program participants and nonparticipants to ensure data fidelity.

Student Interview Data

Table 8 displays asset attainment reported by student participants during their individual interviews. Students who received services participated in both the school support and Prevention Early Intervention (PEI) programs. The percent represents the ratio of coded themed responses to the

total number of responses for each trait. Sample response quotes were chosen to best represent the coded themes.

Table 8

Asset Attainment Reported By Students

Participant Asset Categories	Trait(s)	Theme(s)	*n*	%	Response Examples
Support	Family Support	Encouraged to Learn	86/109	79	My parents always tell me to stay in school and learn, and that I should always try to do my best every day.
Empowerment	Feels Safe at Home/School Feels Valued	Home-School Connection	49/108	46	My program [Why Try] makes me feel important. Now if there are bad people in my neighborhood I can say what I mean and stand up for myself and not get bullied.
Boundaries & Expectations	Teachers Encourage	Emotional Competence	80/91	88	Ms. Jaime [PEI Therapist] helped me feel better. I am still very upset and sad about my dad being gone in prison but now I know what to do when I feel that way.
Constructive Use of Time	Sports, Clubs, Groups Creative Activities	Adventurous	35/64	55	I have done new things I wouldn't have done on my own. I like doing the plays [in Power School]. I also like when we make food together. I made chicken alfredo one day, which tasted really good.
Commitment to Learning	Is Motivated to Learn	Enthusiastic	46/64	72	[Skillstreaming] helped me learn new things that I didn't know before and that makes me want to learn MORE new skills because it's exciting.
Positive Values	Is Encouraged to Help	Caring	64/72	89	Yes, I want to help my family members learn how to manage their feelings better using the techniques my counselor [PEI Therapist] gave me.
Social Competencies	Positive Interactions Expresses Feelings	Social Comp. Emotional Comp. Self-Control	111/118 45/64 45/52	94 84 86	Yes, I didn't use to talk about myself much but [PEI Therapist] has helped me talk more about how I feel and now I want to help make other people feel good too. [Why Try] helped me learn more about myself so I am not angry as much anymore.
Positive Identity	Has Positive Self Esteem Overcomes Challenges	Self Confidence	50/65	76	Yes, I used to feel embarrassed and weird about myself and my identity, but after talking about these issues with my counselor [PEI], it has boosted my self-esteem.

Note. n = Number of themed responses /Total number of trait responses. Students who received services participated in both the school support and Prevention Early Intervention (PEI) programs.

Most student interview responses were associated with the Internal Asset category *Social Competencies*. Most (94%) of the responses coded for the trait "Positive Interactions" were associated with interview questions #15 and #17 – "Did the program help you make new friends? How? Are you better at talking with others because you went to the program? How?" The responses reflected an increase in social competence. One fifth grade student shared,

> Yes, I used to be nervous around other people, especially adults, but being around them more and talking to new and friendly adults and other children [in 'Strengthening Families' and 'Why Try'] has helped me to be calmer and relaxed in new situations.

Also, within the *Social Competencies* asset category a high percentage of student responses were coded for the trait "Expresses Feelings" associated with increased emotional competence (84%), and self-control (86%). When answering question #18, "Did the program teach you what to do when you feel upset? How? one boy stated, "My 'Power School" teacher talked to me and helped me with some of my problems and now I don't get into trouble as much and I can work through my own problems

better." A middle grade student explained, "The 'Why Try' program taught me how to find time for myself to breath and calm down instead of yelling or fighting." A third grader commented, "My counselor encouraged me to use a journal to write about my feelings. When I write, I feel like it calms me down and helps me relax."

Parent Interview Data

Table 9 presents asset attainment reported by parent subjects. Asset categories are listed by traits, and themes. The number reported as a percentage was calculated by dividing the number of themed responses by the number of trait responses. Sample response quotes were chosen to best represent the coded themes.

Table 9

Asset Attainment Reported By Parent Participants

Participants Asset Categories	Trait(s)	Theme(s)	(*n*)	%	Response Examples
Support	Family Support	School Involvement	38/51	74	Attending all the programs helps the schools because there is more support at school from the parents. We try to make all of the meetings but language is definitely a problem. His mom is the one that goes most of the time because I am working.
Empowerment	Feels Safe at Home/School Feels Valued	School Connection	34/69	50	The Community Gang Forum has helped me because I am able to inform my daughter on gangs as she is now growing older and it has helped inform my older daughters.
Boundaries & Expectations	Adult Role Models	Positive Adult Role Models	54/59	92	In our family program [Strengthening Families] we did so many activities together like we danced and sang and cooked together. Even the way we were speaking to our kids, we became more aware of it and it has definitely changed and become more positive.
Constructive Use of Time	Sports, Clubs, Groups	Extracurricular Activity Growth	55/66	83	They spend more time in activities now than last year. They play soccer in the summer and t-ball during the year.
Commitment to Learning	Enjoys Learning	Ambitious Reads for Pleasure	37/67	56	My daughter meets with one of the counselors (PEI), and she is very motivated and wants to go to college. She finishes her homework during the after-school program [Power School], and likes to read. In fact this year he received several reading awards.
Positive Values	Encouraged to Help	Takes Initiative	51/56	91	He is a student helper at school, at home he needs to empty the trash, needs to sweep under his bed, and clean up his clothes. I believe that this school encourages kids to have a voice and be heard.
Social Competencies	Builds Friendships Plans Ahead Resolves Conflicts Positive Interactions	Friendly Forward Thinker Social Comp. Self Control	52/77 49/62 42/63 34/56	68 79 79 60	My son has lots of friends and says he is going to study to be a teacher. He tells me it's important to plan ahead and make good decisions. He is definitely good with his words. He doesn't act out of fury.
Positive Identity	Perceives Good Future	Self Assured	37/64	58	He seems to be very confident with what he needs to do to get there. He does have a passion for computers and that is something I do see him pursuing later on.

Note. ***n*** = Number of themed responses /total number of trait responses. Parents who received services participated in both the school support and Prevention Early Intervention (PEI) programs. Parents who did not receive services did not participate in any youth development program associated with the Glen Project.

Many interviewed parents indicated that their involvement in the Glen Project positively influenced their role as parents both at home and school. The largest majority (92%) of parent responses were associated with the asset category *Boundaries and Expectations*. Within this asset category, and associated with the trait "Adult Role Models", interview question #9 asked, "How has being involved in the Glen Project program affected how you model positive, responsible behavior for

your child? The parents reported that the program had a positive effect on with their ability to be an effective role model. One parent shared,

> My PEI counselor told us about "Turn off Tuesdays". It has been hard because you don't realize how dependent you are on electronics, but it has been positive. I was not a huge advocate at first but the week after Sandy Hook happened, we turned off the TV for a week because we have a kindergartner and it just hit too close to home.

The second highest (91%) number of parent responses were associated with the asset category *Positive Values*. Within this asset category, and associated with the trait "Encouraged to Help", interview question #15 asked, "How has being involved in the Glen Project program affected how your child helps at home? In the neighborhood, or at school?" Most parent responses reported an increase in their child's ability to take initiative. One father commented,

> My son's PEI counselor has encouraged him to help the teacher and his classmates. He likes to participate a lot now. On his report card we have seen that he has been participating a lot more than before. He has opened up a lot more.

Associated with the asset category *Support* and trait "Family Support", parents were asked question #5, "How has being involved in the Glen Project program affected your own school involvement?" Many (74%) parent responses indicated an increase in school involvement. One mother remarked, "My program participation helped me to motivate my daughter because she saw that I was present in her school and home life." A father shared "My wife Isabel helps the teacher at school to cut things and organize papers or do other little jobs she needs. We also go to school program meetings. My son likes seeing his mom in the classroom."

Research Question #4

How did the Glen Project impact the school climate? To more deeply understand how the Glen Project affected the school climate, the researcher surveyed participating teachers (n=23) and

interviewed the school principal. Teachers completed the pre/post *Creating a Great Place to Learn* school climate survey in the fall and in the spring. The school principal submitted annual Discipline Reports and completed an exit interview and reflection for analysis.

Teacher Data

The first significant finding in the teacher data revealed that at the beginning of the study most of teachers held negative perceptions about relationships in the school. In the fall, a significant number (100%) of teachers strongly disagreed with Question #47 "This school provides a caring and supportive environment for me" compared to their perceptions in the spring (4% Strongly Disagree). It was noted that in the spring, most teachers (70%) strongly agreed with Question #29 "I feel accepted and respected as a colleague by most staff members" compared to fall teacher surveys (10% Strongly Agree).

The second significant finding was discovered through several survey questions related to the organizational aspects of the school. In the fall, all teachers (100%) strongly disagreed with Question #50 "Students are free to make suggestions to the principal or other administrator" compared to their perceptions in the spring (0%, Strongly Disagree). Also in the fall, all teachers (100%) strongly disagreed with Question #44 "Students treat each other with respect" compared to their perceptions in the spring (4% Strongly Disagree). Similarly, in the fall, all teachers (100%) strongly disagreed with Question #46 "The administration enforces disciplinary policies consistently" compared to spring teacher perceptions (9% Strongly Disagree). It was noted that in the spring, most (82%) teachers agreed with Question #30 "Most students are helpful and cooperative with staff" compared to their perceptions in the fall (20% Agree).

The third significant finding was noticed through survey questions related to a teacher's personal development. In the fall, the majority (100%) of the teachers strongly disagreed with Question #45 "My work gives me a feeling of accomplishment" compared to the spring (4% Strongly Disagree). Of

note, the researcher found that in the spring, the majority (78%) of teachers agreed with Question #85 "If some students in my class are not doing well, I believe that I should change my teaching approach" compared to fall teacher perceptions (30% Agree).

Principal Data

To ascertain the effects of the Glen Project on school discipline referrals, academic referrals and the number of student suspensions, the researcher compared annual Discipline Reports, conducted an informal interview, and examined an end of the year reflection. Data from the report and reflection suggested that the Glen Project positively impacted the school climate. In the previous year, there were 127 discipline referrals, 171 academic referrals, and 41 suspensions. By the end of this study, there were only 83 discipline referrals, 58 academic referrals, and 20 suspensions. All referrals were lower than the previous year for: (a) discipline (down 35%), (b) academics (down 66%), and (c) suspensions (down 51%).

In an informal interview at the beginning of the year, the principal revealed a psychosocial disconnect between the school staff, parents, and students. She shared that most of the teachers expressed a belief that the school was an unsafe place because of students' destructive behaviors, cultural and linguistic mismatch, and the psychosocial misunderstanding of the effects of poverty. She also shared that the parents had reported a similar distrust in school personnel because of perceived injustices experienced by their child. In her end of the year reflection, the principal indicated that parents were more connected to the school, and that teachers and students demonstrated increased empathy toward each other. The principal shared,

> At the beginning of the year, we had a concern that parents would not want to participate in the PEI services because of the stigma attached to mental health problems and a dissatisfaction with the school environment. Many parents expressed a belief that the school was an unsafe place because they believed teachers treated their child unfairly. But, by having the PEI staff on our

campus, parents got to know them from the first day of school and we were able to quickly build trust with several families who were then willing to accept help. A few of our highest needs families participated in the 16-week "Strengthening Families" workshops and as a result have been more visible on campus, have interacted more with school staff, and seem generally happier and more positive with their children. The overall school climate also seems calmer and more nurturing and tolerant. Many teachers now approach students with the attitude that behaviors are a form of communication and can deliver consequences with empathy and at the same time seek to get the students the help they need versus seeking to simply punish them. As a result, students also treat each other with more empathy and have even been known to approach the PEI staff seeking "therapy" for their friends.

Discussion

Current U.S. studies reporting the mental health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have found that children and adolescents are experiencing higher rates of depression and anxiety than pre-pandemic rates because of everyday life disruptions associated with increased social isolation, increased stress of parents, increased family conflict, and decreased access to mental health care (Meade, 2021). Other studies in the U.S. have reported that mental health services were ranked as the #2 concern for caregivers of 6–12-year-old children during the pandemic (Fitzpatrick, Carson, & Weisz, 2021). In post-pandemic schools, educators are acknowledging the role that schools play in teaching and supporting mental health (Chafouleas, Johnson, Riley-Tillman, and Iovino, 2021) and are prioritizing three mental health components: social relationships, emotional and behavioral well-being. Now more than ever, children need a set of interrelated skills and values that will serve as protective factors to recover from the negative mental health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

To date, few studies have examined effective universal mental health services at the elementary school level for vulnerable, Latinx children and their families. Universal services shift the focus away

from the traditional problem-based approach and strategically follow a strengths-based, asset-driven approach. This study tested the hypothesis that a carefully designed universal mental health program (The Glen Project) can positively strengthen the well-being of Latinx children, their families, and positively impact the overall school climate.

Developmental Asset Attainment

Quantitative and qualitative evidence from this study suggest that the interactions that took place among participants in The Glen Project were positive in developing children's developmental assets. Multiple sources of data collected from both children and their parents verified that asset attainment increased in all four Internal Asset categories – (a) *Commitment to Learning*, (b) *Positive Values*, (c) *Social Competencies*, and *Positive Identity,* and three out of four External Asset categories (a) *Constructive Use of Time,* (b) *Boundaries and Expectations* and (c) *Support.* Of interest, student assets decreased for the External Asset trait "Seeks Parent Advice".

The following corroborative quantitative and qualitative data may provide an explanation for this decrease. For the asset category *Positive Identity*, the One-Way Repeated Measures ANOVA revealed that students who participated in school support services increased their *Positive Identity* asset attainment for the trait "Overcomes Challenges". The associated interview question confirmed an increase in students' self-esteem. Students participating in school support services reported that they were confident about their identity, and students participating in PEI mental health services expressed confidence regarding their school abilities. Persistent throughout the interviews, students reported that the "Why Try" and "Power School" programs emphasized esteem-building concepts. When asked "Do you like yourself better because you went to your program? If so, how?" one student responded, "Yes, I feel okay now because of 'Why Try'. I no longer feel ugly, and this makes me very happy." Another commented "Yes because at 'Power School' friends are always by my side. I am not afraid that I will be lost in class anymore."

Parents also observed an increase in the positive identity development in their children. Parents whose child participated in school support services shared that their child was self-assured, and parents with children participating in PEI mental health services commented that their child had a positive identity because they learned how important it was to assure them. One parent whose child participated in the "Why Try" program shared,

> She is a little on the chubby side, but she is the one that always says, 'mom let's go for a walk, I don't want them to call me chubby.' She always wants to better herself so she can be more confident in herself.

Not surprising the One-Way Repeated Measures ANOVA revealed that participating students receiving both PEI mental health and school support services also made significant asset gains in the Internal Assets *Positive Values, Positive Identity, Commitment to Learning,* and the External Asset category of *Constructive Use of Time*. The following student and parent interviews described the powerful outcomes of these asset attainments. Students shared that after school programs like "Power School" gave them the opportunity to be adventurous and try new things through such activities as performing arts, cooking, and roleplay. They clarified that their desire to try new things was also motivated by an enthusiastic response to new skills they learned in other school support services such as "Skill Streaming". For these students, there was a clear connection with positive school-based activities and an excitement for new learning. They were motivated through structured, after-school, interdependent learning.

Parents verified their child's perspectives. Program participants reported that their child enjoyed reading for pleasure and ambitiously wanted to pursue a higher education because of their involvement in PEI and "Power School". Like the students, the perspectives of the parents reflected their child's intrinsic motivation to learn rather than an extrinsic motivation to please their parents through school

attendance. One program participant reflected, “Because of her program, she just likes to learn. She doesn’t want to disappoint herself. She has high expectations. It comes easy to her. She is a learner.”

The Wilcoxon Signed Rank z-test confirmed the increase of a fourth Internal Asset - *Social Competencies*. According to student interviews, a large majority of students who participated in the program conveyed positive experiences associated with the themes “Social-emotional Competence” and “Self-Control”. Most students suggested that “Power School” provided a safe place to develop friendships. For interview question #15 “Has your program helped you make new friends? If so, how?” one third grade boy responded, “Yeah because ‘Power School’ is a place where I feel safe and comfortable to branch out and meet new people.” Another student added that the “Power School” program “helped me find new people to play with and now they’re my best friends.” Student interviews also confirmed an increased awareness regarding emotional regulation. For interview question #18 “Has your program helped you know what to do when you are angry or frustrated? If so, how?” the students who participated in the program were able to articulate anger management skills such as journaling, self-reflection, time out, breathing, counting, singing, painting, and relaxation techniques that they learned in programs such as “Power School”, PEI mental health therapy, and “Why Try”.

Parents who participated in the program also observed the presence of these traits at home with their children. Many parents shared that they observed the following social competency traits (a) Builds Friendships, (b) Plans Ahead, (c) Resolves Conflicts, and (d) Positive Interactions. Coded for themes (a) Friendly, (b) Forward thinker, (c) Social Competence and (d) Self-Control. Parents expressed that their child’s involvement in their perspective school programs increased their ability to build and maintain friendships and control their frustrations and anger. One parent shared, “The Glen Project does a fabulous job tackling friendships and what it means to be a good friend. My child has lots of friends of all ages. The school really attempts to make a healthy safe space.” Moreover, many

parents reported observing the following anger management skills that children practiced at home – time out, relaxation techniques, and verbalizing feelings. One mother shared, "She goes to a place by herself then comes and talks when she is more relaxed."

As previously presented, the increase in multiple Internal and External Developmental Assets may explain the reason why the need to seek parental advice diminished at the end of the year. The data from the study suggested that students whose *Commitment to Learning* in environments with clear *Boundaries and Expectations* that promote *Positive Identity* development, *Positive Values*, a *Constructive Use of Time,* and *Social Competencies* increase their confidence, motivation, and self-efficacy. Current research has found that high self-efficacy in learning environments raise student self-directed learning (Mirzawati, Neviyarni, & Rusdinal, 2020).

Principal Perceptions

Recent studies have reported that a universal approach to school based mental health programs effectively enhance social emotional competence, positive prosocial attitudes, and behavior (Cefai et al., 2022), especially for students from ethnic minorities, and students from low socio-economic backgrounds. The comparative data collected from the principal's annual School Discipline Report and the end of the year reflection corroborated these reports. The following data suggested that the Glen Project services positively affected school wide referral patterns in all categories. In her end of the year reflection, the principal explained,

> The above data reflects what I had a feeling was happening this year. I noticed that the number of referrals coming into the office seemed to be less than last year. I attributed this to a couple of things. First, because we now have an on-site therapist, a full-time psychologist/school lead, and two additional PEI staff on campus, our teachers are more likely to consult them or ask them for help before sending students to the office on referral. Second, because of the various trainings teachers have participated in, they are employing behavior intervention strategies and approaching

students with more empathy. As a result, teachers are better able to handle challenging behaviors in the classroom or more likely to seek advice about a challenging student rather than to send them out on referral. Additionally, suspensions are down significantly. I attribute this to the reduced number of referrals and the understanding among staff as well as myself that suspensions are not a productive form of behavior intervention. Having PEI staff on campus gives us an immediate intervention that is both non-punitive and gets to the cause of the problem and a plan for a remedy.

The principal's reflection also noted improvements in parent-teacher-student relationships throughout the year. She stated that at the beginning of the year, parents felt disconnected from the school because it was "unsafe", and "culturally insensitive", and "unfair", therefore parent participation was low and school referrals were high. She explained that this shifted as a direct result of a 16-week "Strengthening Families" workshop. She noted that the school's highest needs families became "more visible on campus" and seemed "generally happier and more positive with their children."

The principal observed similar shifts among teacher attitudes and behaviors. At the beginning of the year, she shared that the teachers felt the school was "unsafe" because of students' destructive behaviors. However, by the end of the year, she believed that many teachers could "deliver consequences with empathy and at the same time, seek to get the students the help they need versus seeking to simply punish them." The principal's overall impression was that universal services offered through the Glen Project created a school climate that seemed "calmer and more nurturing and tolerant" and that students demonstrated increased empathy toward one another. The school's efforts to build positive personal and interpersonal relationships through teacher trainings and Glen Project services, corroborated findings from Kang-Yi et al., (2018) who posits that fewer school referrals and suspensions are associated with effective universal school-based mental health interventions for economically disadvantaged children.

Teacher Perceptions

In the fall and spring, the researcher administered the *Creating A Great Place to Learn* school climate survey to the teachers to learn if the Glen Project positively affected school climate in three categories: (a) Relationships - intrapersonal dynamics within the school, (b) Organizational Attributes - organizational culture, quality of the work environment, and (c) Personal Development - adaptive efficacy and commitment. Throughout the year, the teachers received multiple trainings to teach them how to set up a bully free classroom (the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program), handle discipline using positive behavioral intervention supports (the Love and Logic Discipline Program), and (c) and create a trauma-sensitive environment where students feel safe (The Therapeutic Crisis Intervention Protocol Training). The data collected from the climate survey supported the principal's observations and revealed significant improvements in all three categories of the school climate from the fall to the spring.

In the Relationships category, 100% of the teachers did not feel that the school provided a caring and supportive environment for them at the beginning of the year. However, in the spring, only 4% held these beliefs. Also, only 10% of the teachers felt accepted and respected by their colleagues in the fall, but in the spring, 70% strongly agreed with this perception.

Analysis of the teacher survey data also found significant shifts from fall to spring in the Organizational Attributes category. At the beginning of the year 100% of the teachers did not feel that the students were free to make suggestions to the principal or other administrator. However, in the spring, no teachers felt this way. Additionally, in the fall, 100% of the teachers did not feel that students treated each other with respect, whereas in the spring, only 4% of the teachers observed disrespect among students. Moreover, 82% of the teachers felt that students were helpful and cooperative with staff in the spring compared to fall when only 20% of the teachers expressed this opinion.

Regarding perceptions in the Personal Development category, 100% of the teachers did not feel their work gave them a feeling of accomplishment in the fall. However, in the spring only 4% felt this way. Of note, 78% of the teachers felt that they should change their teaching approach if some students were not doing well in the spring, whereas only 30% held this belief in the fall.

Past research studies have observed that teachers' perceptions of school climate include factors such as classroom management, disruptive behaviors among students, and positive relationships between teachers and the administration (Mitchell, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2010; Yang et al., 2018). The findings in this study support the expanding body of research suggesting that effective professional development can increase teacher morale and raise student outcomes (Hill et al. 2021). These findings are a valuable contribution to the field because calls for pandemic recovery outcomes to historically marginalized students emphasize that teachers have the knowledge and skills to develop safe classroom environments that promote equity and inclusion (Jin, 2021).

Limitations

There were several limitations associated with this study that constrained the generalizability of the findings. This study studied the first year of the Glen Project implementation therefore, even though the data is promising, it cannot be perceived as conclusive. Additionally, because data were drawn from a small pool of self-reported perceptions during the student and parent interviews, conclusions about various program effects inhibited the generalizability of the qualitative research findings. Finally, the ability to measure change in program effects over time was constrained by the scope of the project.

Conclusion

Elementary schools today face enormous challenges in developing the academic and social-emotional wellbeing of the diverse children and families in their charge. Noncognitive skills are broadly accepted traits that comprise the definition of what it means to be *educated* (Heckman &

Kautz, 2012). Such skills are developed through the instructional and social interactions that take place throughout the elementary school years. Multiple studies indicate that cognitive development in children is directly linked to the possession of noncognitive traits (Durlak et al., 2011). Visionary expectations for post-pandemic schools include equipping children with assets that strengthen skills involving problem solving, social-emotional competence, creativity, self-confidence, and the self-control that prepare them to successfully transform all aspects of their social ecology (García, 2014).

Although historically, most economically disadvantaged children lack access to free, universal mental health programs, the findings in this study offer a different outcome. Both the quantitative and qualitative data in this study suggested that the first year of the Glen Project program offered an effective positive child development model that increased critical protective factors throughout the child's ecology. Data also suggested that the increased attainment of social-emotional assets positively equipped children to build healthy peer connections at home and at school.

The initial year of the program not only appeared to have a positive effect on interpersonal connections, but it also had a positive effect on the school environment through decreased student referrals, increased developmental asset attainment, increased school climate**,** and positive parent connections. The findings reported that developing a child's positive values resulted in an increased desire to help at home, in the school, and in the community. Of interest, the study suggested that family involvement and how a child spends his or her time outside of class improved student self-efficacy, self-confidence, creativity and the commitment to learn new things supporting previous findings that family involvement in and out of school can socially and emotionally reconnect a child to the community by raising student achievement in reading and language arts, mathematics skills, thinking skills, social skills, the motivation to learn, and a positive school environment (Ruppert, 2006; Voorhis, et al., 2013).

Deeply embedded in the microsystem of transformative interactions is the desire for a child to connect to his/her world. Developmental assets are not just skills, they are the relational synapse that nurtures connections to all socializing agencies in a child's ecosystem. Sameroff (2009) proposes that "Children affect their environments and environments affect children." (p. 19). Supporting this thesis, the current study hopes to contribute new perspectives to the growing body of literature on the positive development of children within foundational socializing systems of a child's ecology.

Implications for Future Research

Recommendations for future research include the development of a reliable means to assess the longitudinal academic, mental health, and social effects of each service within the Glen Project. Data from a larger pool of student, parent, teacher, and administrator interviews should be accessed over time. Additionally, it would be interesting to study this model of a school based, universal mental health program in multiple school settings throughout a district. Ultimately a broad based, longitudinal study of school-based, universal mental health programs for underserved Latinx children and their families can provide an ecologically centered model for much needed change that significantly informs the future for all children, schools, and communities.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The author declares that there is no competing financial interests or personal relationships to disclose for this research study.

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